

I. INTRO:

- A. [Biblical] Anthropology has four divisions:** creation, providence, man in original righteousness, fallen man.
- B. Last week we started looking at Providence, the second of the three major works of God in time (the others are creation and redemption [salvation]).**
 - 1. We saw that Providence consists of two main works: preservation and government.**
 - a. God directs and controls all creatures, the inanimate, animals, men and angels, and all events.
 - b. God’s ultimate purpose in providence is His own glory in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Although God governs and controls sin, He is not the author of sin** (He does not perform the sin, He does not compel sinners to perform sin and He never approves of or delights in sin, Acts 2:23, 4:27-28).

II. PROVIDENCE AND COMMON GRACE

A. There are some who confuse God’s providence with a false teaching called common grace.

- 1. Common grace has three aspects, all of which are false:**
 - a. God in giving good things to the reprobate shows favor and love to them; thus good things are “grace.”
 - b. God restrains the wicked in this life by working common grace in them so that they do not break into all possible evil. This explains why we are not living in a kind of hell on earth.
 - c. God works in men by common grace to enable them to do civil (but not saving) good and thus to please God and produce a culture which pleases God.
- 2. Common grace really means that God has two purposes in providence**
 - a. One is the preservation and salvation of His elect church in Jesus Christ to the glory of His name
 - b. The other is the development of man’s potential (art, science, morality, religion) in a godly culture.

B. Before we address the individual ideas about common grace we need to remember definitions.

- 1. Grace is three things**
 - a. Grace is first that attribute of God according to which He is the perfection of all beauty. God’s grace therefore is unchangeable, almighty, eternal, etc. It cannot be common.
 - b. Grace is a beautiful attitude of favor shown to His people in Christ. *Does God thus favor the wicked?*
 - c. Grace is the power of God so to work for and in His people to beautify them spiritually with the blessings of salvation
- 2. To bless or to curse**
 - a. First, the word bless/curse is *barach* and it means a formal announcement by God over someone, whether a pronouncement of good or evil (Job 1:5, 11; I Kings 21:13).
 - b. Second, when God blesses He speak well upon someone, that is, it is the effectual word of God’s favor causing a person to be blessed, bestowing blessedness on someone. *Bless* might seem like a rather bland word but that is what it means, “the effectual word of God’s favor” (Eph. 1:3).
 - c. Third when God curses He speaks evil upon someone, that is, it is the effectual word of God’s wrath causing a person to be unspeakably miserable, inflicting misery upon someone. Having seen that read Prov. 3:33 and Psalm 37:22. *There is no middle between bless and curse. God is indifferent to none.*
- 3. The basic teaching of common grace is that in giving good things to the reprobate ungodly, God blesses them and shows favor to them.**
 - a. Now it is true that God gives good things to the wicked. Look at the wicked men of this world, they drive fancy cars, they enjoy expensive holidays, they enjoy good health, they have an abundance.
 - b. But the question is, *Why?* Now, the doctrine of providence teaches us that they do not have those things by chance: God gave riches to the wicked in His providence; God so ruled all things that the wicked come into possession of many good gifts.
 - c. On the flip side, often the wicked receive *more* of this earth’s goods than God’s children. It is the lot of God’s children to suffer while the wicked prosper. It is the lot of God’s children to travel the narrow, difficult road to eternal life while the wicked travel the wide, broad, spacious and pleasant road which leads to destruction (Matt 7:13-14).
 - d. The fact of the prosperity of the wicked is the occasion of two temptations (and these temptations are exacerbated by the teaching of common grace): *envy* and *fretting to do evil*. Look at Psalm 73:3 and 37:1.

III. GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL DEALINGS WITH THE WICKED IN THIS LIFE

A. All the good things which God gives to the ungodly come to them not in grace but in wrath.

1. **Grace is not found in things but in *the attitude of God* by which He gives things. God gives good things to the ungodly but with them He does not give His blessing.**
 - a. Numbers 11:33 and Psalm 106:15 show that God can give good things *in His wrath*.
 - b. Examine these verses: Psalm 73:18 (Figure: a man walking on very thin ice and God piles upon him gold); Ps. 37:8-9, 13, 17, 20, 22, 28, 34-40 (notice the contrast between the wicked and righteous, esp. v. 22); Ps. 92:6-7 ("it is that" [purpose]); Ps. 145:20
 - c. If grace is found in things and things are tokens of God's love, what are sickness, poverty, etc, a token of to God's people? Does God curse and hate His people when they are afflicted (no, Rom. 8:28)?
2. **God gives good things to the wicked in His providence for several reasons**
 - a. *The wicked serve the elect*. The wicked do not deserve to breathe God's air or smell God's flowers or eat God's food; they are unwelcome in God's house, *but undeserved gifts are not grace*. The wicked deserve to be plunged into hell from birth, but then God's purpose in providence would not be fulfilled. The wicked are necessary. The Bible uses the figure of wheat and chaff. The chaff cannot be destroyed until the wheat has grown and matured. Rom. 9:17 (Why did God give Pharaoh so many good things?)
 - b. *The wicked must develop in sin*. The wicked are so from birth. They are born totally depraved, but that wickedness must be seen. God wills it so. God wills that the wicked fill the cup of iniquity and they do so while God gives good gifts to them so that God's justice can be magnified in punishing them. Gen.15:16.
 - c. *The wicked must have no excuse*. God gives so much good to the wicked. He does not leave Himself without a witness. But what do the wicked do with their millions of dollars, their cars, their abundance of food, their good health, their art, their culture, etc? They are not thankful. They do not use it for His glory. *They use it all to sin against God*. And God will demand an account from them. Rom. 1:21.
3. **But, what about proof texts for common grace?**
 - a. Matthew 5:44-45. There are four things ("love, bless, do good and pray for" your enemies). The advocates of CG say that we must love our enemies because God loves His enemies by making the sun to shine on the evil and the good and upon the just and the unjust. But, God does not love, bless, do good and pray for all men. He does not love the wicked. He hates them and He wills their destruction (Ps. 5:5, 11:5). He does love His enemies, those He reconciles to Himself by Christ (Rom. 5:10, Col. 1:21). God's goodness, love, mercy, grace are particular and effectual to the saving of His people.
 - b. Psalm 145:9: The "all" and "all His works" refers to His saints (v. 10). This is demanded by the Hebrew parallelism. Verse 20 shows God's attitude to the wicked.
 - c. Remember, that common grace means that God has a favorable disposition to the wicked which is not eternal, which is not effectual and which changes at death. Such is not the grace of God, Psalm 136.

B. Briefly, the other two points of common grace

1. **Does common grace restrain sin?**
 - a. No, common grace does not restrain sin, and God never shows favor to the wicked in restraining sin.
 - b. God's restraint of sin is like putting a muzzle on a rabid dog. The muzzle does not improve the dog but prevents it from biting which it would do if not muzzled.
 - c. How does God restrain sin? Why are all unbelievers not Hitler? Men do not have all opportunities to sin. God in His Providence withholds some of the means. But they sin with the means they have. And when God gives them over to sin, they sin all the more. The fear of punishment restrains men from sin. God has given the civil government (I Tim. 2:2, Rom. 13:3). Sin takes time to develop in a man and in a society.
 - d. Some say that without CG we would all be beasts and devils. But in that case, God must give CG to the damned in hell because they are not beasts and devils. They remain men, totally depraved men.
2. **Does common grace give men the ability to do good (civic good)?**
 - a. The wicked cannot do anything good in any sense because a good work must be done out of faith, for the glory of God and in obedience to God's Law.
 - b. All the supposed "good works" of the wicked are sins. They are done for various reasons (selfishness, vainglory, etc) and therefore cannot please God. Rom.14:23, Rom. 3:10ff, 8:7-8, Eph. 2:1-3, etc.